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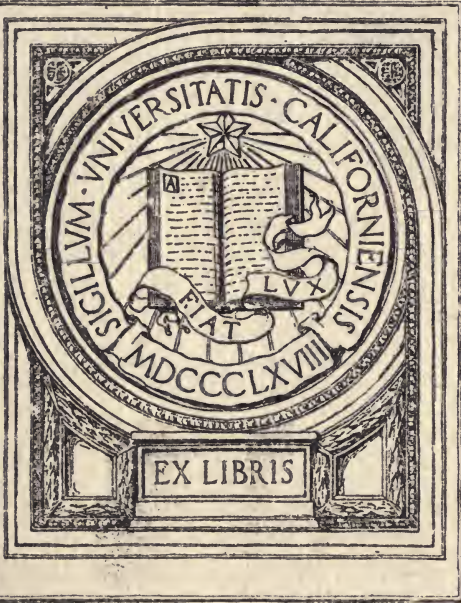


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GEORGE BORROW: AN ENGLISH
HUMORIST IN SPAIN

RUDOLPH SCHEVILL

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GEORGE BORROW: AN ENGLISH HUMORIST
IN SPAIN

RUDOLPH SCHEVILL

Seventy-five years ago two Englishmen travelled over the length and breadth of the Spanish Peninsula on widely different missions. One was Richard Ford, who was engaged in compiling a handbook on Spain for John Murray, the well known London publisher; the other was George Borrow, who had undertaken the sale of Spanish Testaments in order to spread the Word of the Gospel on behalf of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

The results as published by both travellers seem destined to endure: Ford's *Handbook* is still the authoritative and most readable introduction to the conditions in Spain during the thirties of the last century; Borrow's *The Bible in Spain*, a most brilliant and melodramatic mixture of truth and buncombe, has continued to appear in edition after edition for reasons not far to seek. The English reading public has not only been content to see Anglo-Saxon superiority once more dramatically and irrefutably demonstrated, but it continues to welcome a book which seems to justify our traditional indifference to the subject treated, namely, poor backward Spain and the benighted Spanish people.

The characters of Ford and Borrow could not have been more diametrically opposed.

Ford was a most modest gentleman, a thorough scholar, an ideal traveller because he was a respecter of other

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people's opinions; of a retiring disposition he was especially given to observe, and record his impressions. He jotted down, among other things, an infinite number of homely, terse Spanish sayings which he quite invariably translated for the benefit of his British public, and he illustrated the great age of many a custom by striking references to the Greek and Latin classics. The latter, however, he does not render in English, for he could assume in his day and generation that none of his readers needed a translation, while in this iron age there are only a few of us left who can almost decipher their meaning. Ford, too, had a delightful sense of humor, not unlike that of the Spaniards, which makes all racial barriers less formidable to any stranger dwelling among them. Moreover, seeing things as they were he was not inclined to take windmills for giants, nor every repellent exterior as the indication of a bloodthirsty heart. He says at the beginning of his guide-book: "Of the many misrepresentations regarding Spain, few have been more systematically circulated than the dangers and difficulties which are there supposed to beset the traveller." We shall see how the agent of the Bible Society was one of those who indulged in many misrepresentations.

Borrow, on the other hand, had received only an un-systematic, home-made education; by temperament fearless and impulsive, he could undertake nothing gently, nor did he comprehend why the Lord who would naturally support the efforts of the British Bible Society did not furnish him with the necessary clap of thunder whenever he himself entered on the scene. He took to noisy advertising at first, then to remonstrance, then, as his schemes met with opposition, to scolding and vituperation. He was like a character out of an opera bouffe, inclined to pose and fond of being conspicuous. He never made one of a friendly group. A "perambulating polyglot," who boasted that he could speak and write some thirty tongues, he was always ready to show his skill. Although he is one of the most brilliant letter-writers in the English language when summarizing his

experiences, he lapses into verbiage or evangelical cant when he philosophizes or reflects. He had come into Spain with one object, that of scattering Testaments, and one pre-conceived notion, that Spain was the most heathenish place in Christendom. He did manage to scatter several thousands of Testaments, but he performed an even greater miracle, that of leaving Spain after a sojourn of several years with precisely the same prejudices and unfounded opinions which he had entertained before setting foot on Spanish soil. Being a solitary individual he suffered from quickly changing moods, and his observations are therefore frequently so highly colored as to be wholly untrustworthy. Nothing is more amusing in his career than his impatience with the ungrateful authorities who did not appreciate his mission of light, but took him for an impertinent intruder and thrust him into vile Spanish dungeons without any reason whatever. For was he not justified in interrupting the Spaniard's traditional siesta to sell him a Testament and a tract on British religious enlightenment?

One of the fine and really attractive qualities of the average Spaniard is his conservatism: he finds certain features of his life as endurable and proper as they were two thousand years ago, perhaps because they were endurable and proper that long ago. Much that is implied in the unpoetic word innovation has remained a sealed book to him. Speed has been contrary to his native dignity, and he has never appreciated the advantage of travelling faster to places to which he does not care to go. Just so his provincial customs, his altar and his hearth have been dear to him. He has developed a homely and sound philosophy in the midst of humble conditions; he has accumulated an inexhaustible fund of humor with which to illustrate this most imperfect scheme of life; he has become convinced that the universal hardships of all existence, intensified by the hot Spanish sun, justify protracted repose and deliberate procedure in daily routine. He has also realized that the less we move about the less we see of foolish people.

All of this is what Borrow never grasped. Moreover, the Spaniard is an inveterate smoker, and Borrow hated tobacco. The idiomatic flavor of the Spanish language had no interest for him apart from its linguistic traits. Indeed, at times the reader is inclined to believe that Borrow was either ignorant of the English equivalents of certain Spanish words or that he wrote nonsense on purpose. Thus he invariably translates *caballero*, 'cavalier,' or 'sir cavalier,' when he must have known after years of experience that it either means 'man' or that it is the ordinary way of accosting any man, as for example, "*Dispense usted, caballero*" which simply means, "I beg your pardon, sir." 'Usted' he translates 'your worship' when it would never occur to anyone to say to a waiter, for example, "Will your worship bring me another glass?" Here, for example, is a piece of *bonne blague* which Borrow sets down as the usual Spanish manner of speech. He is addressing a simple soldier: "I dismounted, and taking off my hat, made a low bow to the constitutional soldier, saying, 'Señor Nacional, you must know that I am an English gentleman travelling in this country for my pleasure. I bear a passport, which on inspecting you will find to be perfectly regular. It was given to me by the great Lord Palmerston, Minister of England, whom you of course have heard of here. At the bottom you will see his own handwriting. Look at it and rejoice; perhaps you will never have another opportunity. As I put unbounded confidence in the honor of every gentleman, I leave the passport in your hands whilst I repair to the *posada* to refresh myself. When you have inspected it, you will perhaps oblige me so far as to bring it to me. Cavalier, I kiss your hands.' "

The intricate characteristics of the Spanish people, their immemorial traditions, their vast literature, their art, the moulding facts of their history are never referred to by Borrow, and unquestionably never interested him. Above all his idea of humor was certainly not that of the Spanish people, nor of the genial Ford. He has, to be sure, presented

the most ridiculous situations in a striking way, but you do not feel sure that he is laughing over them. Men like Borrow seldom find a congenial companion, and he therefore had no one either to laugh with him, or to prevent him from making himself ridiculous. The most unusual events strike him as extraordinary rather than amusing. He had come to Spain with a single object, and it aroused his resentment to find himself hampered by an ignorant people in carrying out his ostentatiously philanthropic plans. Borrow was thus the last man in England to understand the Peninsular character on which the sun, Oriental traditions and the Roman Catholic Church—among other un-English influences—had placed a unique stamp.

The recent issue of Borrow's letters to the Bible Society, which had been thought lost, suggests an entirely new point of view of the man and allows us to add a few traits to the portrait of this brilliant vagrant, whose book, *The Bible in Spain*, has for decades so delightfully entertained and fooled an infinite number of readers. Only a relatively small portion of that book is taken directly from these communications sent to the Society; and they assuredly have more value than his book because they gave his impressions before he had time to doctor them. Wherever the original has been furbished up, the revised version is apt to be top-heavy with the ego of the author, consequently his additions present far more of Borrow than they do of Spain. But let us accompany him through his wanderings and note his own first comments. Where it is possible we shall let him speak for himself.

Borrow's orders on leaving England appear to have been very simple: Whosoever will take away the New Testament let him have the Old also, and add thereto a few tracts. His entrance into the Peninsula was bound to be melodramatic. He wrote to the Secretary of the Society that before beginning his campaign in Portugal where he landed, he made inquiries as to "which was the province of that country the population of which was considered the

most ignorant and benighted." Having learned that it was the Alemtejo he at once determined on going thither with a small cargo of Testaments and Bibles. "My reasons I need not state, as they must be manifest to every Christian; but I cannot help thinking that it was the Lord who inspired me with the idea of going thither, as by so doing I have introduced the Scriptures into the worst part of the Peninsula, and have acquired lights and formed connections (some of the latter most singular ones, I admit) which if turned to proper account will wonderfully assist us in our object of making the heathen of Portugal and Spain acquainted with God's Holy Word." He now hired a wild-looking lad to ferry him across the Tagus, but unfortunately the lad did not speak any of Borrow's thirty tongues, for "he gabbed in a most incoherent manner" with a "harsh and rapid articulation" like the "scream of a hyena blended with the bark of a terrier." This circumstance coupled with the fact that a storm arose and that the lad did not know much about sailing made it apparent that it was only "the will of the Almighty that permitted them to gain shelter on the other side." The guide with whom Borrow now proceeds on his way at once regaled him with the "truly horrible" tales of the atrocities which robbers "were in the habit of practicing" in those very spots; and while the mules stopped to drink at a shallow pool, Borrow reflects that the gang "were in the habit of watering their horses at the pool and *perhaps* of washing their hands stained with the blood of their victims." But his courage went further; he climbed up to the place where once stood the home of the banditti, now in ruins, and found there vestiges of a fire and a broken bottle. "The sons of plunder had been there very lately," so he took the opportunity to leave a "New Testament and some tracts among the ruins, and hastened away." We may take for granted the speedy repentance of these blood-thirsty villains. Continuing his course he meets some wild-looking men who, if they were not banditti, could easily have been mistaken for such.

Nevertheless, he reached Evora safely, the center of the darkness he had come to dispel, and at once determined to lay the axe to the root of all superstition and tyranny by finding some respectable merchant who would take charge of the necessary sale of his cargo. He also made it a point to speak to as many "bigoted Romanists" as possible on matters connected with their eternal welfare, "telling them repeatedly that the Pope whom they revered was a deceiver and the prime minister of Satan here on earth." No doubt the words which he uttered sank deep into the hearts of his hearers, for we are told they departed "musing and pensive." Borrow may have been a trifle optimistic. There are many things which can make us depart musing and pensive. His guide, for example, when asked whether his master could understand the language of the people replied in the affirmative, but added that he probably spoke some other language better. Again, when we hear our most revered institutions decried we may depart musing and pensive in search of a half-brick. Having learned too of some of the superstitions of the peasantry, notably their peculiar beliefs in witchcraft, some of which are as old as the race, he characterizes them as "relics of the monkish system," the aim of which had been merely "to besot the minds of the people." It was therefore evident that more tracts were needed here. So he rode about the neighborhood, "dropping a great many in the favorite walks of the people," thinking that if they found them on the ground, "curiosity might induce them to pick them up and examine them." Thus we find the most benighted people in Portugal, who had presumably never seen a printed word in their lives, alert and curious enough to devour the tracts of the British Bible Society, conveniently dropped in their favorite walks. Of the sale of the Testaments we hear nothing further, for the letter concluding his sojourn in Portugal was evidently never received, and we next find Borrow in Madrid.

Spanish critics have asserted that the British Bible Society took advantage of the turbulent conditions in Spain and

Portugal at this time to sell Testaments because its agents could escape the vigilance of the authorities occupied as they were in quelling the rebellion against the central government at Madrid. There seems to be some justice in this accusation. Nevertheless, whatever side of the argument we choose to take, a period of civil war was not the time to introduce the Gospel to the people of Spain. Such wars have always assumed with them a unique aspect; politics and religion are inseparably linked in the questions at issue. A man with a gun is apt to consider himself a military unit, and while he is waiting behind a harmless-looking hedge-row with a blunderbuss in order to impress his opinions on the passer-by, it might seem inadvisable to attempt to sell him a New Testament. In the face of these conditions, Borrow wrote to the Secretary of the Society: "A little patience and a little prudence is all that is required to win the game." His first object was necessarily to obtain permission to print a Spanish translation of the New Testament, but without any notes or comments. Versions in this bare form had been prohibited in Spain ever since the beginning of the sixteenth century, and only unusual conditions or extraordinary pressure could squeeze the coveted licence out of the authorities. Borrow first visited the Prime Minister, at that time Mendizábal; but the atmosphere around that gentleman reminded him of the temperature at the North Pole, and he found himself obliged to withdraw with the vague promise that when matters in the Peninsula had settled down a little the Bible Society "would be allowed to commence operations." His request had other obstacles to contend with. Cabinets were shortlived in those days, lasting a few weeks, or at the most, a few months; to lay a plea before the Prime Minister was therefore like negotiating a loan with a man through the car-window when his train is already moving out of the station. Nor would the promises made by one minister necessarily seem binding to his successor.

In the meantime an article had appeared in a Spanish paper, explaining to the whole nation "the philosophic and civilizing mission" of the agent of the Bible Society, which, not content with making Great Britain the *sole* beneficiary of this salutary institution was willing "to extend it to all countries." Such generosity must have appealed to all Spaniards—if any ever read the article. But Borrow had more matter to communicate which would afford the reverend committee at headquarters "subject for some congratulation." He had been in Madrid less than three months, but had discovered that the authority of the Pope in Spain was "in so very feeble and precarious a situation" that "little more than a breath is required to destroy it." Borrow was evidently about to supply the necessary breath, for he adds "that he was doing whatever he could in Madrid to prepare the way for an event so desirable." Moreover, if the Man of Rome continued in his subversive course he would lose Spain and then "Ireland will alone remain to him—much good may it do him!" If Borrow showed himself now and then a trifle gullible, his Society must have been equally naïve, for there is in all the replies of its Secretary but little evidence that the members ever laughed in committee over his epistles. But as he took himself seriously at all times it is little wonder that the philanthropic gentlemen at the London end of things should merely express themselves as deeply interested in his proceedings. The Reverend Secretary Brandram, however, admonishes Borrow "with a rap on the knuckles" that it is wiser for an agent of the Society not "in vulgus spargere voces: verbum sat . . . Information of what is passing we are glad to receive, but do not mix yourself up in such matters." In his next letter Borrow therefore contented himself with referring to the Pope merely as "a certain personage," but reiterated his opinion that "the last skirts of the cloud of papal superstition are vanishing below the horizon of Spain."

Evidently all this was dictated by an increase in Borrow's optimism. The new Ministers seemed favorable to his scheme of printing the Testaments; it was merely a question of getting their approval as long as the Cabinet remained in existence. This Borrow managed to do with the aid of the British Ambassador; but "since many of the friends of the Spanish Ministers were bigoted Papists" the latter stipulated that the printing should be done in a private manner. The books were to be issued secretly, the matter was not "to be noised abroad," and Borrow expressed his "perfect readiness to comply with so reasonable a request." Much time, however, was destined to elapse before further progress in printing could be made. The government went through various changes, a riot had overthrown the Constitution, and Borrow himself made a flying trip to England to lay his plans of campaign before the Committee of his Society. The report of his proceedings in Spain is one of the most characteristic things he ever penned and betrays the exaggerated rhetorical qualities of his mind and style. In his attempts at formal writing of an evangelical character he was apt to launch himself upon such figures as the following: "No time ought to be lost in supplying those with the Word who are capable of receiving it; . . . Though the days of the general orange-gathering are not arrived when the tree requires but a slight shaking to scatter its ripe and glorious treasures on the head of the gardener, still goodly and golden fruit is to be gathered on the most favored and sunny branches; the quantity is small in comparison with what remains green and acid, but there is enough to repay the labor of him who is willing to ascend to cull it; the time of the grand and general harvesting is approaching, perhaps it will please the Almighty to hasten it."

On his return to Spain he wrote from Seville: "Know then, that the way to Madrid is beset with more perils than harrassed Christian in his route to the Eternal Kingdom. Almost all communication is at an end . . . and the reason

is that the rural portion of Spain, especially this part, is in a state of complete disorganization and blackest horror. The three fiends, famine, plunder and murder, are playing their ghastly revels unchecked; bands of miscreants . . . are prowling about in every direction and woe to those whom they meet. A few days since they intercepted an unfortunate courier, and after scooping out his eyes put him to death with most painful tortures . . . Moreover the peasantry . . . seize in rage and desperation on every booty which comes within their reach." After receiving this highly-colored picture, the Committee in London were fully prepared to hear that their fearless agent had met with the fate of Marsyas, and his next letter must therefore have seemed like an anticlimax. It begins: "I am just arrived at Madrid in safety. It has pleased the Lord to protect me through the perils of a most dismal journey." After the above preliminary it was hardly fair to have had no adventure whatever. Indeed, all we learn of interest, is that he reached Aranjuez half-frozen, and got into the home of an Englishman "where he swallowed nearly two bottles of brandy." But realizing the shock that would run through the Committee after such a confession of potential capacity, Borrow adds to assuage matters: "it affected me no more than warm water; . . . if my letter be somewhat incoherent, mind it not—the cold has still the mastery of me."

Having now begun printing the Testaments, he mused on a plan to dispose of the volumes: "As soon as the work is printed and bound, I will ride forth from Madrid into the wildest parts of Spain, where the Word is most wanted and where it seems *next to an impossibility* to introduce it . . . I will take with me twelve hundred copies which I will engage to dispose of for little or much to the wild people of the wild regions which I intend to visit." Thus the melodramatic entrance into Portugal was to be repeated, and Testaments were to be gently dropped in the favorite walks of the wild people of the Asturias and Galicia. Not

a ripple of laughter stirred the Committee on hearing of this plan, the Secretary merely replying: "On hearing your plans a general and simultaneous question was asked. Can the people in these wilds read? . . . Is there no middle sort of course? Can you not establish a *depôt* in some principal place, and thence make excursions of two or three days at a time, instead of devoting yourself wholly to the wild people?" To this Borrow replied, softening the terrors of his project with a pastoral note: "I did not intend to devote myself entirely to the wild people, but to visit the villages and towns as well as the remote and secluded glens." As a matter of fact, Borrow was again drawing completely on his imagination. The experiences of Richard Ford, who is always an excellent corrective lens for Borrow's distorted point of view, show that the Asturias and Galicia at that time were what the present writer has found them today—peaceful abodes inhabited by a backward, close-mouthed, mild, thrifty, overworked race. The skull of the Galician is perhaps a little thick, and the worst that can or could then be said of him is that his thriftiness is so akin to miserliness as to have become proverbial in Spain, that his backwardness has kept him bound too closely to the soil; hence his wildest occupation has been the cultivation of the potato, of corn, of barley and the vine. His brain is somewhat affected by the atmosphere of his smoke-filled hut which quite generally has no chimney, and a wild Galician who can read is as rare as one inclined to spend a copper of what he has earned by the sweat of his brow. To sell him Testaments would therefore be, according to a Spanish saying, as futile an undertaking as looking for five legs on a cat. But the scheme seemed magnificent to Borrow and he accordingly made his preparations for the operative venture. His first step was to purchase "a *black* Andalusian stallion of great size and strength" worthy of 'the passion which he had always had for the equine race,' and well-suited to the regions of his prospective campaign, for he was "unbroke, savage, and furious." Yet he, like the

wild people to whom he was bound, was about to see a great light, for "a cargo of Bibles which I hope shortly to put on his back will, I have no doubt, thoroughly tame him, especially when laboring up the flinty hills of the north of Spain." Having procured his Rocinante, our evangelical Don Quixote had to have a squire, and one worthy of the cause. This is the first one: "I have a servant, a person who has been a soldier for fifteen years, who will go with me for the purpose of attending to the horses and otherwise assisting me in my labors. His conduct on the journey is the only thing to which I look forward with uneasiness; for though he has some good points, yet in many respects a more atrocious fellow never existed. He is inordinately given to drink, and of so quarrelsome a disposition that he is almost constantly involved in some broil. Like most of his countrymen, he carries an exceedingly long knife which he frequently unsheathes and brandishes in the face of those who are unfortunate enough to awaken his choler. It is only a few days since that I rescued the maid-servant of the house from his grasp, whom otherwise he would undoubtedly have killed, and all because she too much burnt a red herring which he had given her to cook . . . He is very honest, a virtue which is rarely to be found in a Spanish servant, and I have no fear of his running away with the horses during the journey, after having perhaps knocked me on the head in some lone *posada*." This servant's tenure of office was very short; presumably, his inordinate love of drink did not have merely the effect of warm water, and another servant had to be found, this time a Greek who spoke French. But before knight and squire could ride forth, the master was taken ill and had to resort to the "desperate experiment of calling in a native barber." We now have the picture of the Society's agent relieved of sixteen ounces of Protestant blood by a horrible Papist who was naturally skilled in blood-letting. Nevertheless, the start could at last be made, Borrow setting out with only his servant and their animals, traversing for four

days regions reported to swarm with banditti, cut-throats, wild beasts and other natives who, as usual, neglected to put in an appearance. In the large cities through which Borrow passed he prepared an advertisement of the work which was the sole guide to salvation, explaining incidentally the pecuniary sacrifices made by the Society in its efforts to dispel darkness. A small candle was lighted, for Borrow had the pleasure "of seeing three New Testaments despatched in less than a quarter of an hour that he remained in the shop." To follow him in his entire journey before his return to Madrid would lead us too far afield; much of it may be found in *The Bible in Spain*, wherefore the gist of his letters must be summed up briefly.

He now passed in his Odyssey through regions "where literature of every description was at its lowest ebb," and after leaving inhospitable Valladolid on the right he continued through desolate plains covered with scantily-sown but smiling barley, the sustenance of an "ignorant and brutal" people, through fever-stricken Leon, filled with "blinded followers of the old Papal Church," and thence to rock-bound Astorga where he took up his abode with the pigs and vermin. But he returned God thanks and glory, and would not have exchanged that situation for a throne. At Corunna he made a depôt of five hundred Testaments, and then proceeded to hope for the dawning of better and more enlightened times.

Because of his histrionic temperament, his highly coloristic style, his attitude toward Nature, Borrow may be considered an important figure of English Romanticism. This is particularly evident in this portion of his letters. In many of his traits he is wholly Byronic; he too could have repeated, "I have not loved the world, nor the world me." In his correspondence as in *The Bible in Spain* he stands isolated, and his brilliant personality dwarfs everything else. (His sympathies are far greater for Nature than for his fellowmen. His feeling for the peculiar charms of the landscape dictated some of the finest pages which he ever

penned and which are worthy to live with the best of the early Victorian age. The following passage, describing a picturesque landscape in northwestern Spain, may serve as an example. "Perhaps the whole world might be searched in vain for a spot whose natural charms could rival those of this plain or valley of Bembibre, with its walls of mighty mountains, its spreading chestnut-trees, and its groves of oaks and willows which clothe the banks of its stream, a tributary to the Minho. True it is that when I passed through it the candle of Heaven was shining in full splendor, and everything lighted by its rays looked gay, glad and blessed. Whether it would have filled me with the same feelings of admiration if viewed beneath another sky I will not pretend to determine, but it certainly possesses advantages which at no time could fail to delight; for it exhibited all the peaceful beauties of an English landscape blended with something wild and grand, and I thought within myself that he must be a restless, dissatisfied man who, born amongst these scenes, could wish to quit them. At the time I would have desired no better fate than that of a shepherd on the prairies or a hunter on the hills of Bembibre." Contrast now the following sudden change: "The aspect of Heaven had blackened; clouds were rolling rapidly from the west over the mountains, and a cold wind was moaning dismally. 'There is a storm travelling through the air,' said a peasant whom we overtook mounted on a wretched mule . . . He had scarce spoken when a light so vivid and dazzling that it seemed the whole lustre of the fiery element was concentrated therein broke around us, filling the whole atmosphere, and covering rock, tree and mountain with a glare indescribable . . . The lightening was followed by a peal almost as terrible, but distant, for it sounded hollow and deep; the hills, however, caught up its voice, seemingly pitching it along their summits, till it was lost in interminable space . . . 'A hundred families are weeping where that bolt fell,' said the peasant. . . . 'were the friars still in their nest above there, I should say

that this was their doing, for they are the cause of all the miseries of the land.' ”

Borrow returned through the far north of Spain and finally reached Oviedo safely after an exceedingly arduous journey, chiefly on foot. He sat down to begin an account to the Society, and had hardly begun a stirring report on the feverish anxiety of the people about him, when he experienced a typical “strange adventure.” “But I am interrupted and I lay down my pen.” Having properly mystified the reader he continues: “I am in a very large, scantily-furnished and remote room of an ancient *posada*, formerly a palace of the Counts of Santa Cruz. It is past ten at night and the rain is descending in torrents. I ceased writing on hearing numerous footsteps ascending the creaking stairs which lead to my apartment—the door was flung open, and in walked nine men of tall stature, marshalled by a little hunch-backed personage. They were all muffled in the long cloaks of Spain, but I instantly knew by their demeanor that they were *caballeros*, or gentlemen. They placed themselves in a rank before the table where I was sitting; suddenly and simultaneously they all flung back their cloaks, and I perceived that everyone bore a book in his hand, a book which I knew full well. After a pause, which I was unable to break, for I sat lost in astonishment and almost conceived myself to be visited by apparitions, the hunch-back advancing somewhat before the rest said in soft, silvery tones: ‘Señor Cavalier, was it you who brought this book to the Asturias?’ I now supposed that they were the civil authorities of the place come to take me into custody, and rising from my seat I exclaimed: ‘It certainly was I, and it is my glory to have done so. The book is the New Testament of God; I wish it was in my power to bring a million.’ ‘I heartily wish so too,’ said the little person with a sigh . . . After about half-an-hour’s conversation, he suddenly said in the English language, ‘Good-night, sir,’ wrapped his cloak around him, and walked out as he had come. His companions, who had hitherto not uttered a

word, all repeated, 'Good-night, sir,' and adjusting their cloaks, followed him." There were evidently some wags in Oviedo in those days.

Borrow had now no more Testaments to despatch, and so set out again for Madrid, where he arrived safely after hairbreadth escapes from incredible imaginary dangers. At the Capital he found a state of affairs anything but prosperous for the sale of Testaments. There were many reasons why people did not care to buy, one of them perhaps being that they had no money. Our agent thus felt obliged to enter the arena personally and opened a shop. At the same time "a violent and furious letter against the Bible Society" demanded a reply, and brought forth a "warm and fiery" epistle because "tameness and gentleness are of little avail when surrounded by the vassal slaves of bloody Rome." Advertisements blue, yellow and crimson were also printed and posted along the streets "causing a great sensation." Yet it never occurred to Borrow that all this noisy publicity was contrary to the promise of reserve and secrecy he gave the Spanish Minister when he received permission to print the Testaments. Nor can there be any doubt but that quiet selling would have continued long and uninterrupted. But the operative method was the only one compatible with Borrow's temperament.

His next report stated "the priests and bigots are teeming with malice and fury" and "there is no attempt however atrocious which may not be expected from such people, and were it right and seemly for *me*, the most insignificant of worms, to make such a comparison, I would say that, like Paul at Ephesus, I am fighting with wild beasts." At last the expected happened, and the priests "swooped" upon the Bible shop, warnings being sent to him to erase from his window the words "Despatch of the British and Foreign Bible Society." This he refused to do since it was his "grand object" to attract attention by them. In defense of his cause he now memorialized the Prime Minister, "a weak, timid, priest-ridden man." The letter which

he claims to have written to that Statesman he forwarded in "translation" to the Society, a translation which is plainly only a version of what Borrow imagined he had written. It has all the ear-marks of an idiomatic English piece of prose in an exaggerated Borrowian style, impossible of being rendered in Spanish. For example, if we were to trust the exact wording given, Borrow wrote to the Prime Minister of Spain the following extraordinary paragraph which would have landed him in a jiffy on the other side of the frontier. "It is unnecessary for me to dilate on the intentions of the Society with respect to Spain, a country which perhaps most of any in the world is in need of the assistance of the Christian philanthropist, as it is overspread with the thickest gloom of heathenish ignorance, beneath which the fiends and the demons of the abyss seem to be holding their ghastly revels; a country in which all sense of right and wrong is forgotten, and where every man's hand is turned against his fellow to destroy or injure him, where the name of Jesus is scarcely ever mentioned but in blasphemy, and his precepts are almost utterly unknown. In this unhappy country the few who are enlightened are too much occupied in the pursuit of lucre, ambition or ungodly revenge to entertain a desire or thought of bettering the moral state of their countrymen. But it has pleased the Lord to raise up in foreign lands individuals differently situated and disposed, whose hearts bleed for their brethren in Spain. It is their belief that ignorance of God's word is the sole cause of these horrors, and to dispel that ignorance they have printed the Gospel in Spain which they dispose of at a price within the power of the poorest to command. Vain men would fain persuade themselves and others that the Society entertains other motives, by which uncharitableness they prove that they themselves are neither Christians, nor acquainted with the spirit of Christianity. But let the most fearful and dubious reassure themselves with the thought, that should the Bible Society foster the very worst intentions, it would baffle their power,

if even assisted by Satanic agency, to render Spain worse than it at present is."

It is an ill wind which blows no one any good, and being particularly bad in Madrid after all these activities, it at last carried Borrow into jail. Yet considering the cause for which he was laboring he felt that he had now conferred upon him the highest of mortal honors. Besides, it was pleasant to be under lock and key long enough to become an international question; henceforth he would be classed with the world's greatest martyrs. But his imprisonment was not only made very comfortable, it was also of short duration through the kind intervention of the Lord, and the British Ambassador, and Borrow was again able to make plans for further disseminating the Word among some neighboring wild people. He therefore rode around in various directions through the hottest part of Spain with the thermometer at 115° F., while the atmosphere resembled "the flickering glow about the mouth of an oven." Others were enlisted in the cause, and took the field provided with Testaments, among them the host of the inn in which Borrow was staying. Of the character of this man we know nothing, but Borrow states: "I had scarcely written the above lines when I heard the voice of the donkey in the courtyard, and going out I found my host returned." This is hardly fair to mine host, but throws some light on the twists of Borrow's mind. Some success is recorded on this journey. For instance, eight poor harvestmen, who appeared to have come to refresh themselves at the door of a wine-shop were instead induced to partake of the water of life at a much smaller price. We are further assured that the arrival of the New Testament "spread like wildfire through the villages" of benighted New Castile. Even Borrow's daily ablutions could not be carried on without interruption. "Last night," he says, "as I was bathing myself and my horse in the Tagus, a knot of people gathered on the bank, crying: 'Come out of the water, Englishman, and give us books; we have got our

money in our hands.' ” It was a foregone conclusion that being in puribus, Borrow should find himself without Testaments on his person. But his servant, at a short distance, was presumably not in the habit of going into the water, for he held up an every-ready copy over which a scuffle ensued, and it was torn from his hands—at a price adapted to the humble means of the purchaser.

Having now sold about nine hundred copies to the “sun-blackened peasantry of Castile,” he returned to Madrid “trusting in the Lord and defying Satan.” There he learned that some factious priests “publicly cursed him in the church more than once,” but as no ill seemed to come from it, we may well believe that the event gave him little concern. He was proud of the success attained, and reported that any failure to spread the Word was due to the fact that “the inhabitants were too much occupied with dancing and other amusements to entertain any serious thoughts.”

Borrow now entered on the last phase of his efforts in behalf of the Bible Society. He made all preparations at Madrid, securing another servant and the “largest and most useful horse” to be obtained. He then wrote to London “I have been very passionate in prayer during the last two or three days; and I entertain some hope that the Lord has condescended to answer me, as I appear to see my way with considerable clearness.” His style was evidently becoming more and more “unusual,” and the London Secretary felt at last obliged to urge Mr. Borrow “to keep to plain language for plain people.” For his last campaign he tried a new system. He disguised himself in the costume of the peasants of Old Castile, and thereafter followed what was perhaps his most striking conquest. “On nearing the village I met a genteel-looking young woman leading a little boy by the hand. As I was about to pass her with the customary salutation she stopped, and after looking at me for a moment she said: ‘Uncle, what is that you have on your *borrico*? Is it soap?’ I replied, ‘Yes, it is soap to

wash souls clean.'” Naturally, not understanding the language of the Bible Society, she welcomed his explanation that he carried “cheap and godly books for sale.” There being little or no money in those parts, the poor woman at first declined to buy; but when Borrow had passed on, the lad came running behind shouting out of breath, “Stop, uncle, the book, the book,” and after handing over three reals in copper he (that is, this little boy who was being led by the hand) seized the Testament and “flourished the book over his head with great glee.”

As was to be surmised, the disguise of the agent did not meet with the unqualified approval of the gentlemen at home; his peasant's costume seemed to ruffle the dignity of the committee. Having first smiled, they began to “grow grave,” and the first levity was promptly succeeded by sober second thoughts. The Committee might “cheerfully employ a peasant, but they were doubtful whether it became them to have the likeness of one going about in their name. A word to the wise, they say, is enough.” In the meantime Borrow sold a number of Testaments at the Capital, in some instances to “every individual in the house, man and child, manservant and maidservant.” His optimism consequently rose again and he wrote to the Committee: “There was a time, as you are well aware, I was in the habit of saying, ‘Dark Madrid,’ an expression which I thank God I may now drop; for can that city justly be called dark in which thirteen hundred Testaments, at least, are in circulation and in daily use?” Borrow therefore felt that his task was well-nigh done and he himself a “useless vessel.” Indeed, he had sold “as many Testaments as Madrid would bear for a time,” and he was afraid of “bringing the book into contempt by making it too common.” He therefore determined to campaign once more in Andalusia, but being “exceedingly superstitious,” and having dreamed that he was “being hacked with long, ugly knives by robbers in a desolate road,” discretion seemed the better part of valor, and the beaten highway

was chosen instead of his favorite wild places. The good men to whom Borrow's letters were addressed were once more displeased with their tone. No doubt it was the indiscriminate mixture of pious and ungodly sentiments which shocked them. Borrow's confession of superstitiousness "when read aloud in a large committee" sounded very odd, don't you know, while the tone of his letter "savoured a little of the praise of a personage called number one." Moreover, Borrow had said that during his perilous journey (in which nothing happened), "his usual wonderful good fortune" had accompanied him. "This," says the Bible Secretary, "is a mode of speaking to which we are not well accustomed—it savours, some of our friends would say, a little of the profane." In reply Borrow humbly expressed regret that he had thus erred and promised to mend, saying that he had already prayed for assistance to do so. No more expressions "savouring of pagan times" would be used; but it is hard for the leopard to change his spots and he relapsed into his epistolary sins of omission and commission to the end.

The small store of Testaments which remained was now seized and the malicious act reported thus: "It was Sunday when the seizure was made, and I happened to be reading the Liturgy." Indeed, one of the constables, being of an observant turn of mind, remarked on the "different manner in which the Protestants and Catholics keep the Sabbath, the former being in their homes reading good books (one of them being a personage called number one) and the latter abroad in the bullring, seeing the wild bulls tearing out the gory bowels of the poor horses." After giving vent to these pious sentiments, we may imagine the constable hurrying away so as to be in time for his favorite spectacle.

Although Borrow's usefulness in Spain had now come to an end, he was anxious to get in a few last blows for the cause. By means of the utmost secrecy he was still able to give "the blessed books considerable circulation."

But the ruffians who beset him everywhere now laid hand upon him for the last time, and "he was led or rather dragged to jail." His sojourn in the prison of Seville was not prolonged, more is the pity, as he might well have used his leisure time in making a careful and complete record of the extensive rogue's vocabulary for which that jail has always been famous, thus carrying out an undertaking for which he was qualified by his tastes and gifts. After his release he hurried to Madrid to demand redress of the Spanish Government for the various outrages he had been subjected to during his final efforts.

The door being now closed in Spain to any further activities of the British and Foreign Bible Society, its agent was definitely recalled. We would like to believe Borrow's own statement in spite of his many misrepresentations of the truth, that the years of his sojourn in the Spanish Peninsula were among the happiest of his life. Indeed, it would but seem reasonable to expect that after so many years of wandering through Spain he should have carried away some faithful mental images as well as a few trustworthy opinions to the effect that, although the Spanish Government has been very generally bad, the people have something in them that is commendable or good; or that the Church with all her shortcomings is not wholly bloody, bigoted, satanic and the rest, since it was at least suited to the temper of the Spanish people. No such objective attitude could have been expected from Borrow's peculiar temperament. On his return to England, filled with bitter feelings against Spain, he stated that "the Spaniard has no conception that other springs of action exist than interest or villainy"; that among the people of the Peninsula he had met "only three who were not scoundrels, thieves or assassins." And a few years later he was asked to review Richard Ford's *Handbook on Spain*, a duty he ought to have undertaken cheerfully inasmuch as Ford had in his usual kindly spirit reviewed *The Bible in Spain*, stinting neither praise of the book nor

admiration of its author. Borrow, on the other hand, sat down in a temper and without mentioning the work of Ford at all penned a strangely unreasonable arraignment of the Spanish Peninsula and of every inhabitant, all of which could certainly not have been calculated to make popular a book purporting to be a guide through that country. Was he filled with jealousy of Ford's splendid work? At all events, his attitude showed a fanatical and small spirit. The article was submitted to Lockhardt, the editor of the *Quarterly Review*, who expressed a wish to add a few extracts from the *Handbook* so as to give some idea of what the review pretended to be reviewing. This Borrow curtly refused to allow, as it was tampering with his paper, and it was therefore rejected. If he had had any sense of proportion or sweet reasonableness in his nature he would have appreciated a certain old Spanish legend. This tells us that once upon a time in the good old days a certain King of Spain was walking in his gardens and behold,—Santiago, Patron Saint of Spain, suddenly stood before him. Now the countenance of the King seemed troubled, and the Saint, knowing that he had at heart the good of the Spanish people, asked him to express the wishes dearest to him, and that, if possible, they would be granted. "Bestow on my country," said the King, "an admirable climate." "Granted," said the Saint, "what next?" "May there ever be abundant harvests of the earth's best products." "So be it," replied Santiago. "May my country ever boast valiant sons and winsome daughters." "That, too, I grant," was the answer. "Let Spain always be favored with an excellent government." "Never," cried Santiago, "that is impossible; for if I were to grant you a regime worthy of this blessed land, even the angels would abandon heaven to make their abode in Spain."

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